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ABSTRACT

This study explored parents' beliefs and practices regarding participation in the schools, investigating why they chose to become involved and the types of involvement that were meaningful to them. Researchers mailed surveys to parents of middle school children from two schools in Nassau County, New York, that differed in size, ethnic population, and socioeconomic status. Parents were asked to identity beliefs used in constructing the manner and style of involvement, classify specific practices performed, and describe the person completing the questionnaire. Overall, parents felt positive about themselves and their relationship with schools, feeling welcomed and valued by schools. They made independent, personal choices in deciding the level and manner of involvement, unrelated to their perceptions of school practice and teacher attitudes. They considered their role in parenting and academic support very important. Their preferred form of involvement was providing support at home. They were less involved in communication with schools or activities related to school events. Parents distinguished between feeling welcomed and valued by schools and being encouraged by teachers to be directly involved in academically supporting of their children. They felt teachers did not encourage them to provide direct academic support. Parents reported a high degree of self-efficacy regarding themselves and their ability to support their child. Overall, there was a meaningful relationship between parents' beliefs and practices. (Contains 42 references.) (SM)

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Parent Involvement: The Relationship between Beliefs and Practices

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It is clear from the research that parent involvement plays an important role in the academic success of children. Chavkin and Williams Jr. (1989) concluded that "Recent research has made an overwhelming case for parent involvement in children's education. The evidence that parent involvement improves student achievement is now incontrovertible" (p. 1). The preponderance of research shows that parent involvement benefits the learning and achievement levels of students (Chavkin, 1993; Comer, 1986; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1983, 1987, 1990; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Hobbs, Dolecki, Hoover-Dempsey, Moroney, Shayne, & Weeks, 1984; Keith, Keith, Bickley & Singh, 1992).

Despite this, studies report that parents have little or no involvement with schools (e.g. assisting teachers at school, attending school events or communicating with teachers) ((Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Becker, 1982). According to Eccles and Harold (1993),

> Both teachers and parents think that family involvement in the school is important and can have positive effects. So why is it that parents are not more involved with the schools? Lack of family involvement can stem from various parent characteristics and experiences....and lack of family involvement can stem from various school and teacher practices. (p. 569)

The primary purpose of this study was to explore parents' beliefs and their relationship to parents' practices, in order to better understand why parents choose to become involved and

the types of involvement that are meaningful and important to them.

The literature identifies tw sets of factors that have the strongest influence on parent involvement: 1) beliefs of the parents themselves and 2) the attitudes, actions, and practices of teachers and schools.

Parents are more likely to be involved when they feel welcome in supporting the educational needs of their children (Ames et al. 1993, Brian, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995; Lareau, 1987; Okey & Cusick, 1995).

Research shows that parents want to be involved but often feel excluded by teachers, who, they believe make judgments about their level of interest and ability on the basis of their socioeconomic status (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein (1986) Epstein & Dauber, 1989).

The issue of efficacy is also an important one for parents. In describing the construct of efficacy, Bandura (1989) states, "Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than peoples beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (p. 1175). Parents who have a low sense of their abilities will shy away from being involved with a child's education (Bandura, 1993). They develop a personal construct to help determine the manner and style of their involvement with their child and his/her school. As Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) state, "We also believe that parents become involved because they have a sense of personal efficacy for

helping their children succeed in school" (p. 313).

Within schools, teachers have the most direct influence on parent involvement. Parents are more involved when teachers openly encourage them and develop program initiatives that support parent involvement (Epstein, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995; Podell & Soodak, 1993). While most teachers espouse support for parent involvement, few initiate programs or seem to possess strong underlying beliefs in parent involvement and its outcomes (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Brian, 1994; Epstein & Dauber, 1989).

Research also suggests that teacher attitudes vary based on parents' socioeconomic status, with some teachers having a preconceived view of low socioeconomic (SES) parents. They tend to see these parents in a negative light, disinterested in their child's education and unable to help teachers (Davies, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Lareau, 1987; Okey & Cusick, 1995; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Powell, 1978; Stevenson & Baker, 1987).

Administrators affect parent involvement on two levels: they institute practices, procedures, and policies on a school-wide basis that involve parents; secondly, through the attitudes and beliefs they express, they influence teacher support for and participation in programs that encourage parent involvement (Epstein, 1987, 1990; Chavkin & Williams Jr., 1987).

School support for parent involvement can influence teacher perceptions and thereby directly and indirectly affect parent involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Dauber, 1989). As Epstein and Dauber (1989) found from their study of 171 educators in elementary and middle schools, teachers' attitudes about parent involvement are positive when school-wide programs are in place.

Much of the research on parent involvement has focused on outcome, primarily as it relates to student achievement, parental preference for and actual levels of involvement, teacher beliefs and practices that influence parent involvement, and the role of school administrators and their practices. Many studies are descriptive in nature; examining parent practices that attempt to quantify specific acts and the frequency with which they occur (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Brian, 1994; Goodson & Hess, 1996; Stevenson & Baker, 1987).

Although research highlights the importance of parent beliefs as related to engendering positive and sustaining involvement (Ames et al., 1993; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), there are relatively few studies that specifically address this issue. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggest that parent involvement models should include personal construct variables that parents develop to determine the extent and type of involvement they will have. They state:

> We believe that parents become involved in their children's education primarily as a function of the

> parents' role construction, the parent sense of efficacy for helping his or her child succeed in school, and the general opportunities and demands for involvement presented to children and their schools. (p. 326)

As the authors note, while role construction, efficacy and school experiences are conceptually linked to parent involvement, this relationship has not yet been fully explored and empirically established.

In addition, there is a dearth of research about parent involvement in the middle schools. Because of the cognitive, social, and emotional changes that occur during this age span, parents play a particularly important role in the interdisciplinary approach of middle schools (Colemen, 1994; Harnett, 1991; National Association of Secondary School, Principals, 1995; St. Clair & Hough, 1992).

Building on the conceptual models developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, this study examined

1. The beliefs parents have about parent involvement, (self-efficacy, beliefs about schools, and parental role construction).
2. Parents reported practices of four dimensions of parental involvement (parent awareness, direct instruction at home, parents as nurturers/supporters and parent activities in school).
3. The relationship between these beliefs and practices.

Method

A survey questionnaire specifically developed for this study was mailed to 1695 parents of middle school children (6th, 7th, and 8th grade) in two middle schools in Nassau County, New York, a suburban area 25 miles outside of New York City. The schools differ with respect to size, ethnic population, and socioeconomic status.

The total number of surveys mailed to School A was 1075. Parents completed and returned 641 surveys, a return rate of 60%. The total number of surveys mailed to School B was 620. Parents returned 194 completed surveys, a return rate of 31%. Overall, 835 questionnaires were completed and returned, at a rate of 49%.

School A has a total population of 1,159 students consisting of 608 boys and 551 girls. The student body is predominantly Caucasian (85%) with 3% African-American, 5% Latino and 7% Asian American. Ten percent of the students receive a federally subsidized free or reduced lunch. The respondents were primarily female (85.5%) with approximately equal numbers being parents of 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. In terms of the educational level, the School A sample was approximately evenly divided among the respondents who completed high school, completed college or completed graduate or professional school.

School B has a population of 620 students consisting of 292 boys and 328 girls with 64% African-American, 27% Latino, 5% Caucasian, and 4% other. Eighty-three percent of the

students receive a federally subsidized free or reduced lunch. Similar to School A, the respondents were primarily female (82.5%), with approximately equal numbers being parents of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. Contrary to School A, in School B 12.4% did not complete high school, 39.7% completed high school, 26.3% completed college and 21.6% completed graduate or professional school.

Instrument

The parent questionnaire contained various rating scales organized into four sections that asked parents to identify various beliefs they use in constructing the manner and style of their involvement, classify specific practices they performed, and provide descriptive information about the person filling out the questionnaire.

The first section contained 21 questions dealing with two aspects of parent beliefs: self-efficacy and parents' beliefs about schools and teachers. For the purpose of this study, self-efficacy was defined as the degree to which parents believe they have the ability to exert a positive influence in helping their child achieve academic success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parent beliefs about schools was defined as whether parents feel respected, welcomed, supported, and encouraged by schools. Parents were asked to agree or disagree using six options ranging from agree very strongly to disagree very strongly.

In the second section, 23 questions related to role construction examined the way that parents define and establish

a basic range of activities that they feel are important, necessary, and meaningful for them to support the education of their child. Parents were asked to indicate their beliefs about the importance of each form of involvement using response options ranging from not important to very important on a 5-point scale.

The third section had two parts containing a total of 20 questions that examined actual parent practices. Joyce Epstein's parent involvement model was used to develop the specific items in the survey. It is used as a source in a number of studies and articles seeking to define aspects of parent involvement (Ames et al., 1993; Brian, 1994; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Chapman, 1991; Davies, 1991; Dietz, 1992; Epstein, 1986, 1987, 1990; Epstein & Dauber, 1989; Foster, 1993; Friedman, 1993; Grolnick, Apostoleris, & Rosen, 1995; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Using Epstein's typology the items relate to four categories of parent practices. The first deals with parents as nurturers and supporters providing encouragement at home, being a role model, and reinforcing school rules. The second category related to parent awareness, being informed and aware of school goals. The third category concerned direct parent involvement in school-based events and activities. The fourth category in this section referred to parent practices regarding supervision and direct instruction at home.

In this section, parents rated the frequency of these practices on a 5-point scale ranging from never to often. Part

One of this section contained 14 questions and part two contained 6 questions. The distinction for these two parts concerns the frequency of an activity. Clearly the term "often" takes on a different meaning when parents are asked about attendance at school board meetings versus making breakfast for their child. Since the questions in both parts are frequency of occurrence questions, use the same categories to develop items, and have the same rating scale, they were considered as one section for the purposes of analysis.

The fourth section in this questionnaire contained 5 demographic items concerned with the grade of the child in the middle school, parent's level of education, gender and parent's own experience in school.

Results

All tests of significance used α=.05. In order to be considered meaningful, results had to account for a minimum of 10% of the variance (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991).

Factor Analysis

Each of the major sections of the questionnaire were factor analyzed and subjected to an iterated principal axis common factor analysis. Squared multiple correlations as initial estimates of communality were used. The unit of analysis was the parent, with item responses constituting the data input. Both orthogonal (uncorrelated) and oblique (correlated) rotations were examined to determine a final solution. Loadings $\geq$.4 were considered meaningful for factor interpretation as well as for selection of items for subscales.

Items that did not load on any factor were not considered.

Efficacy/beliefs about schools.

The oblique three factor solution was retained as the final solution for interpretation. The pattern and structure matrices of the three factor oblique solutions are presented in Table 1.

Factor 1 (3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18) contains items that focus on parents feeling welcomed and valued by schools. The factor was named **WELCOME/VALUED**. Factor 2 consists of three items (4, 5, and 7). They deal with the parents' sense of their ability to succeed when helping their child. Consequently, this factor was named **EFFICACY**. The third factor has three meaningful items (19, 20, and 21). These items focus on parents who feel encouraged by teachers to be involved and to provide academic support for their child. This factor was named **ENCOURAGEMENT**.

Based on the results of the factor analysis for the first section, three factor-based scales were constructed: **Welcome/Valued, Efficacy, and Encouragement.** Scoring was obtained by averaging the items that loaded on each factor and then creating three scale scores for each parent; each score ranging from 1 to 7 (the initial items which were on a 6 point scale were re-coded to a 7 point scale to allow for missing data). The means score for efficacy was 5.31 for welcomed/valued, 5.29 and for encouragement, 5.08.

An examination of the numbers suggests that parents, as a

Table 1 Factor Loadings-Efficacy and Beliefs about Schools

	Pattern Matrix			Structure Matrix		
Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1.	.29	.05	.03	.30	.16	.13
2. R	.39	.15	.04	.47	.32	.28
3.	**.67**	.10	.04	.65	.17	.34
4. R	.02	**.43**	.14	.26	.48	.28
5. R	.00	**.83**	.02	.32	.82	.23
6.	**.42**	.15	.01	.47	.31	.24
7. R	.08	**.73**	.01	.38	.77	.28
8.	**.76**	.01	.13	.70	.27	.24
9. R	**.69**	.01	.08	.74	.31	.43
10. R	**.55**	.20	.04	.66	.44	.39
11.	**.65**	.06	.04	.66	.31	.30
12. R	**.43**	.17	.02	.51	.35	.29
13.	**.50**	.04	.02	.47	.14	.20
14. R	**.55**	.03	.18	.66	.31	.47
15. R	**.46**	.04	.15	.55	.27	.39
16. R	**.70**	.05	.20	.77	.28	.53
17.	**.74**	.18	.00	.67	.11	.31
18. R	**.59**	.03	.09	.62	.23	.38
19.	.09	.08	**.73**	.30	.27	.71
20.	.28	.02	**.61**	.60	.33	.76
21.	.17	.01	**.69**	.51	.27	.77

- Retained meaningful loadings ($\geq$ .4) are boldfaced/underlined.
- Items numbers with an R were reversed to have higher mean scores reflect a more positive response.

group, have positive feelings about themselves and their relationship with schools. An examination of the three factors suggest that parents are somewhat less encouraged by teachers to provide academic support for their children, but nevertheless feel welcomed and valued by schools. Coefficient alpha, estimates of reliability were .89 for the welcome/valued factor, .73 for the efficacy factor, and .89 for the encouragement factor.

Role construction.

The oblique three factor solution was retained as the final solution for the 23 role construction items. The pattern and structure matrices of the three factor oblique solutions are presented in Table 2.

The items loading on factor 1 (5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, and 15) deal with parents giving support and nurturing to their children. This factor was named **PARENTING**. The items on factor 2 (1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 16, and 18) focus on activities that deal with parent communication with the school. This factor was given the name **Communication/School**. The third factor contains 3 items (17, 20, and 21) that relate to parents providing academic support at home. This factor was named **Academic Support**.

Based on the results of the factor analysis, three scale scores were constructed for the second section: **Parenting**, **Communication/School**, and **Academic Support**. The scores range from 1 to 5. The mean score for parenting was 4.63, for academic support, 4.41 and for communication/school, 3.38.

Table 2 Factor Loadings-Role Construction

	Pattern Matrix			Structure Matrix		
Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1.	.12	**.49**	.11	.14	.48	.25
2.	.14	.34	.11	.35	.45	.33
3.	.34	**.56**	.15	.50	.64	.25
4.	.03	**.70**	.02	.27	.70	.29
5.	**.73**	.00	.00	.72	.30	.36
6.	**.60**	.12	.01	.66	.39	.37
7.	**.66**	.14	.18	.69	.20	.46
8.	.36	**.54**	.13	.52	.64	.27
9.	**.47**	.02	.06	.50	.21	.30
10.	.03	**.68**	.01	.26	.67	.27
11.	.16	.22	.39	.46	.45	.57
12.	**.54**	.05	.10	.61	.32	.40
13.	**.69**	.01	.03	.70	.29	.38
14.	**.47**	.17	.00	.54	.37	.32
15.	**.65**	.09	.06	.64	.21	.36
16.	.13	**.58**	.06	.41	.66	.36
17.	.35	.02	**.43**	.57	.30	.61
18.	.09	**.71**	.16	.29	.74	.40
19.	.08	.21	.35	.36	.39	.48
20.	.00	.03	**.71**	.38	.32	.72
21.	.16	.01	**.66**	.50	.32	.74
22.	.06	.16	.28	.28	.30	.39
23.	**.46**	.32	.00	.60	.52	.37

• Retained meaningful loadings ($\geq$ .4) are boldfaced/underlined

The numbers for the parenting and academic support factors suggest that parents find these two areas important. However, there is more homogeneity of responses in the parenting factor with a standard deviation of .47 and a greater spread in the academic support factor (1.33). This suggests that parents are in agreement to a greater degree when it comes to parenting issues. Communication/school has the smallest mean of the role construction factors, suggesting that parents do not see this as meaningful as the parenting and academic support factors. The reliabilities for the role construction factors were .84 for parenting, .83 for communication/school and .76 for academic support.

Parent practices.

A careful examination determined that the four factor solution was found to be more interpretable. The only factor that is not correlated with any other is factor 2. However, given that the remaining correlations are meaningful, the oblique four factor solution was retained for interpretation. The pattern and structure matrices of the four factor oblique solutions are presented in Table 3.

Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, and 14 load on factor 1. These items focus on parents' communication with schools and teachers and supervising the progress of their child. This factor was named **Communication/Progress**. Four items (11, 15, 18, and 19) load on factor 2. They focus on the non-academic support parents give to their child. This factor was named **Support/Nurture**.

Table 3

Factor Loadings-Four Factor Oblique Solution: Parent Practices

	Pattern Matrix				Structure Matrix			
	Factor				Factor			
Item	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1.	**.65**	.01	.07	.04	.68	.16	.20	.34
2.	.05	.01	**.71**	.06	.17	.23	.71	.18
3.	**.40**	.14	.10	.13	.46	.26	.06	.35
4.	.05	.03	.04	**.67**	.33	.29	.16	.66
5.	**.41**	.06	.08	.28	.53	.19	.23	.45
6.	.05	.06	**.63**	.10	.21	.21	.66	.29
7.	**.74**	.01	.15	.05	.80	.24	.32	.43
8.	.06	.17	.12	.19	.21	.33	.26	.35
9.	**.71**	.06	.21	.03	.78	.29	.38	.44
10.	.02	.09	.00	**.66**	.28	.42	.22	.69
11.	.23	**.43**	.07	.07	.34	.49	.13	.37
12.	.17	.01	**.69**	.05	.28	.25	.72	.24
13.	**.47**	.04	.31	.08	.58	.28	.45	.41
14.	**.57**	.23	.02	.06	.65	.39	.23	.44
15.	.18	**.49**	.07	.03	.37	.35	.22	.86
16.	.00	.10	.02	**.92**	.37	.35	.22	.86
17.	.04	.06	.01	**.67**	.35	.42	.25	.73
18.	.18	**.40**	.18	.16	.00	.50	.33	.34
19.	.00	**.71**	.03	.04	.14	.70	.26	.33
20.	.29	.30	.26	.09	.14	.38	.33	.20

• Retained meaningful loadings ($\geq$ .4) are boldfaced/underlined.

There are three items (2, 6, 12) that load on factor 3. This factor was named **School Events**. The last factor contains 4 items (4, 10, 16, and 17). These items center on parents providing direct academic support for their children. This factor was named **Learning at Home**.

Based on the results, four factor-based scales were constructed for the third section: **Communication/Progress, Support/Nurture, School Events, and Learning at Home.** Four scale scores were created with ranges from 1 to 5. The mean score for support/nurture was 4.07, for learning at home, 3.83, for communication, 3.15 and for school events, 2.18. Parents indicated their preferred form of involvement centered on providing support for their children at home, followed by academic help at home, suggesting that parents perform these practices fairly regularly. On the low medium range are parents activities involving communication with school. Finally, as a group, parents were less involved in activities related to school events. This factor also had the most spread (SD = 1.10) suggesting that parents had a greater diversity in the range of their involvement with this level of parent practices. The coefficient for communication/progress was .85, school events, .76, and learning at home, .82, all appropriately reliable. The support/nurture factor was less reliable at .59. Therefore, this scale is somewhat weaker and will need to be examined in more detail in the future.

The relationship Between Beliefs and Practices

In order to explore the relationship between the practice variables (4 sets) and the belief variables (6 sets), a canonical correlation analysis was performed.

With four variables in one set and six in the other set, at most four canonical correlations can result. Testing all four canonical correlations together in an omnibus test yields statistical significance (Λ=.31; F=46.29711; df=24, 3290; p<.05). Subsequently, each canonical correlation was examined for significance and all four were found to be statistically significant. However, only the first three are potentially meaningful. In order to decide the number of canonical correlations to interpret further, the redundancy coefficient was examined. The 1st redundancy coefficient for practice is 24% and the 1st coefficient for belief is 16%, with the three remaining sets 5% or below. Therefore, the redundancy coefficient as well as the relationship within each canonical set makes it clear that only the first one is meaningful and appropriate for discussion in this study. Standardized and structure coefficients were utilized to interpret the nature of the relationship between practice and belief.

An examination of the four practice variables in the first variate shows that they all have meaningful structure coefficients. Squaring each of the structure coefficients indicates the proportion of variance that they share with the canonical variate. For example, learning at home shares 72% of the proportion of variance with its own canonical variate and

the other three share between 42% to 46%. Learning at home appears to have much more importance in this correlation. An examination of the structure coefficients for the six beliefs in the first variate reveals that five have meaningful structure coefficients, the most important ones being communication/school (68%) and academic support (64%). The variable welcome/valued is not meaningful (3% of the variance) and the efficacy and encouragement variables account for 17-19% of the variance. It appears that overall the first relation is with all four practice variables and five belief variables. It should be noted that the role construction variables are more important than the efficacy/beliefs about schools variables in their relationship with parent practices.

In order to see if there are significant differences between School A and School B, a one-way Manova was performed. The independent variable was school and the dependent variables were the 6 belief and the 4 practice variables. The overall Manova is statistically significant (Λ=.83; F=16.05920; df=10, 823; p<.05). An analysis of the effect size shows that 16% of the variance is accounted for by group membership. In order to interpret which variables are important, the discriminant function was examined.

The squared structure coefficients reveal that the welcome/valued belief and the support/nurture practice do not play a meaningful role in understanding the differences between the two schools. All of the other variables appear to play some role in the overall

difference between the two schools. The most important differences deal with communication/progress (a practice variable) and communication/school (a belief variable).

Discussion

It seems clear that any review of parent involvement by researchers, schools and teachers must begin with the assumption that there is a strong relationship between parent beliefs and parent practices. This study finds that parents first make independent and personal choices in deciding the level and manner of their involvement, unrelated to their perception of school practices and teacher attitudes. Parents who feel personally empowered will develop beliefs about which activities are meaningful to them. As a result, they become involved in a variety of parent practices that support their feelings about parent involvement.

Parents in this study feel welcomed and valued by schools and teachers, but their decisions about parent involvement appear to be unrelated to these perceptions. Parents are comfortable talking to teachers, feel respected, and believe teachers are interested in them as parents. In this study, school and teacher factors do not appear to play an important role in how a parent chooses to become involved to support their child.

Parents distinguish between feeling welcomed and valued by schools and being encouraged by teachers to be directly involved in the academic support of their child. They feel that teachers do not encourage them to provide direct academic

support. Although our study suggests that parents' level of involvement is affected more by their personal choices than the attitude of teachers, certain types of involvement may be tempered by this perception. The findings in this study are consistent with prior research showing that teachers want parents to be "seen and not heard" in matters pertaining to academic involvement.

Based primarily on their personal beliefs about parent practices, parents report that meaningful and important activities (role construction) include making sure homework is done, setting rules at home, getting information about the child's progress, helping with school projects, and being available to help with homework.

Communication with schools rated as a somewhat important parent practice, but parents viewed school related activities, such as attending PTA meetings, helping in the classroom, and going on field trips as relatively unimportant.

Parents in this study report a high degree of self-efficacy regarding themselves and their ability to support their child. They feel that if they work hard on behalf of their child, they can engender change. Parents are confident that when they make plans to help their child, they can succeed.

Parents' practices fall into four categories. Their most frequent parent activities involve providing support and nurture at home. Parents in this study place a greater emphasis on home rather than school-based activities. They

support and encourage their children in a variety of non-academic activities (supervision, discipline, regulating television).

Providing academic support is an extremely important aspect of parent involvement. Parents in this study find this activity important despite evidence in the research that schools are not comfortable with this aspect of parent involvement. Parents in this study want to provide academic support for their children by helping with homework, projects, and studying for examinations.

The communication factor falls on the low end of the scale. Parents in this study do not actively carry out activities that center on communication with schools and teachers. These numbers may reflect parents' perception of not being encouraged by schools and teachers to take an active role in school-based learning. As a result, they may communicate less with the school and turn instead to providing support at home.

When it comes to school related activities, parents report very low levels of activity in this practice. They do not find these activities necessary, helpful to their child, or convenient based on work and family commitments. What has traditionally been viewed as "parent involvement" by schools may no longer be relevant given the dynamics of our world and the families of these middle school children.

The canonical correlation analysis determined that overall there is a meaningful relationship between parent beliefs and

practices. Further analysis of the data revealed a number of interesting elements to this relationship. The only variable not meaningful in this relationship is the welcome/valued belief factor. This is consistent with our findings that parent beliefs play a greater role than schools and teachers in determining the degree of parent involvement.

Among the four practice sets, learning at home is the most important variable contributing to the relationship between beliefs and practices. Among the six belief sets, the most important variables are communication and academic support. These two fall within the role construction set, reinforcing the link between this belief factor and practice.

The Manova analysis found that there were differences between School A and School B on all but two variables. The exceptions are feeling welcomed and valued by schools (belief) and support and nurture (practice). Since the means of these factors were high and there was agreement between schools about their relative meaning, there would be no meaningful difference regarding these variables. The analysis showed that parents in both schools are in agreement that being welcomed by school is not an important factor in determining the extent of their involvement. It also seems clear that both schools have a strong belief in the role of nurture and its relationship to parent involvement. It is important to note that by a 2 to 1 margin, School A parents responded to the questionnaire mailed to the home. This does not diminish the fact that the group of School B parents who did respond reflect high levels of parent

involvement. It does raise a question regarding the School A and School B parents who responded and what might be their views regarding parent involvement.

The importance of parent involvement is based on the assumption that it leads to student success. As a result, schools continually look for ways to get parents "involved" and increase the level of parent involvement. Schools make assumptions about which types of parent practices are associated with involvement and which types of involvement are related to school success. Yet, schools define parent involvement in a discrete manner that places an emphasis on only the visible school-based activities. Schools appear to have a mental model of what constitutes parent involvement based on an historical perspective, school traditions or a comfort with certain parent practices. They narrowly judge parents' level of interest and support based on their attendance at PTA meetings, parent teacher conferences and other traditional forms of parent involvement.

Schools are complex organizations that have developed their own model of what parent involvement looks like and the role parents should play. Many schools need to rethink their views about parent involvement and expand its definition to include practices that take place outside of school. In particular, developing programs that foster learning at home and non-academic support could be a powerful tool to increase meaningful parent involvement practices and develop a collaborative parent to school partnership.

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